

McAuliffe announces \$7.3M grant awarded to transition public safety communications

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Governor McAuliffe announced Wednesday that the Virginia State Police will receive more than \$7.3 million in grant funding to transition all existing radios and communications systems on the Commonwealth's Statewide Agencies Radio System (STARS) to the Nationwide Public Safety Broadband Network (NPSBN). The First Responder Network Authority (FirstNet) awarded the funding as part of its Band 14 Incumbent Spectrum Relocation Grant Program (Band 14 Program). Virginia is one of only eight states and local public safety agencies in the nation to be selected for funding.

The Band 14 Program awarded the state police \$7,304,459 in order to provide the necessary financial assistance to support the relocation of all existing STARS radios and systems from Band 14 in advance of the deployment and operation of the NPSBN. The Virginia State Police was selected as a recipient of the grant due to the Department's technically feasible and viable, solution-based proposal submitted to FirstNet in March 2016. All grant applications for the Band 14 Program Federal Funding Opportunity underwent a competitive review process.

"Virginia has one of the best statewide emergency management systems, and this is a well-deserved grant for the Virginia State Police, public safety agencies and all our first responders,"

Governor McAuliffe said. "The grant funding enables our state and many local public safety agencies access to and use of a nationwide wireless broadband network specifically designated for first responders. By increasing our communication speed and capabilities with public safety entities within and beyond Virginia, we will transform our response effectiveness during emergency situations."

"A state-of-the-art communications system is critical to our public safety," **said Secretary of Public Safety and Homeland Security Brian Moran**

. "We will never forget the sacrifices made by our brave first responders and their families on 9/11, and this network exhibits the progress we have made in telecommunications since that day. Congratulations to the Virginia State Police for receiving this competitive award."

Virginia State Police received the second largest sum of funding from FirstNet for this grant program. The Illinois Emergency Management Agency was awarded \$14 million. The other agencies included the Arkansas State Police; Massachusetts State Police; Department of Defense, Honolulu County, Hawaii; Marshall Fire Department, Mich.; Stamford Fire Department, Conn.; and Post Falls Police Department, Idaho.

In a recent press release, **FirstNet CEO Mike Poth stated**, “Public safety’s needs are our top priority, and we are pleased to be working hand-in-hand with these Band 14 public safety incumbents. The awarding of these grants will help to ensure a smooth transition for these entities while at the same time making sure the spectrum is free and clear for the deployment of public safety’s nationwide wireless broadband network.”

STARS provides multi-channel trunked digital voice and data wireless communications that are specifically designed for public safety requirements, based on APCO Project 25 technology. The STARS network supports 22 state and local agencies* and a total of seven tunnels in Hampton Roads and Southwest Virginia. The design, construction and implementation of the \$361 million communications project began in July 2004. Effective July 2011, the Virginia State Police assumed the engineering, installation, maintenance and operations of the STARS system. STARS allows the Commonwealth to retain a high level of service and security, plus flexibility to add more users when additional radio frequencies are available. The Virginia State Police is responsible for equipping new vehicles, aircraft and boats that belong to the 22 STARS agencies. The agency also supports the Commonwealth Link to Interoperable Communications (COMLINC), which allows dispatchers at the state, federal, county and city communications centers to establish communications patches among all levels of government.

FirstNet has been obligated by Congress to take all actions necessary to ensure the building, deployment, and operation of the nationwide public safety broadband network for local, state, regional, tribal, and federal first responders and other public safety personnel. FirstNet is an independent authority established by Congress in 2012 that is governed by a 15-member Board, consisting of the Secretary of Homeland Security, the Attorney General of the United States, the Director of the Office of Management and Budget, and 12 representatives from public safety, government, and the wireless industry appointed by the U.S. Secretary of Commerce.

*Virginia’s 22 STARS Agencies: Chesapeake Bay Bridge and Tunnel Police; Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services; Department of Alcoholic Beverage Control; Division of

Capitol Police; Department of Conservation and Recreation; Department of Corrections; Department of Emergency Management; Department of Environmental Quality; Department of Fire Programs; Department of Forestry; Department of Game and Inland Fisheries; Department of Health; Department of Juvenile Justice; Department Military Affairs; Department of Mines, Minerals, and Energy; Department of Motor Vehicles; Department of State Police; Department of Transportation; Virginia Information Technologies Agency; Virginia Marine Resources Commission; Virginia Port Authority; and the Buchanan County Sheriff's Department and Grundy P.D.

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